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ABSTRACT

A survey of written and spoken Tennessee English was recently begun. Work is in progress on the first stage of the project, which involves the compilation of a bibliography. Data from the Linguistic Atlas of the Gulf States (LAGS) and the Dictionary of American Regional English (DARE) will be examined in planning the survey itself. The next stage will consist of the preparation of a questionnaire which will concentrate on informants' phonological, orthographic, and syntactic systems (data not collected by the LAGS project). Research techniques will be similar to those of the Arkansas Language Survey (ALS). The questionnaire is model-oriented rather than item-oriented, and enables the interviewer to record informants' speech in a wide range of styles. Samples of written English will also be collected. The general aims of the survey include: (1) the continued gathering of linguistic data useful for identifying geographic boundaries in Tennessee; (2) the investigation of the processes of obsolescence and replacement in the syntactic, phonological, and lexical systems of native Tennesseans; (3) the identification of the linguistic correlates of social stratification of Tennessee English in both its spoken and written forms; (4) the determination of the importance of style shifting as an explanation of linguistic variation in Tennessee; (5) the testing of the hypothesis that Americans generally have a negative attitude toward their own use of language; and (6) the gathering of data yielding information about the relationship between speech and writing. (Author/LG)

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By

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American Dialect Society Section Meeting
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SUGGESTIONS FOR INVESTIGATING TENNESSEE ENGLISH: A SOCIOLINGUISTIC APPROACH TO DIALECT STUDY

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Early this year, prior to my joining the faculty at The University of Tennessee in Knoxville, I read a paper before interested persons from the Department of English and the College of Education at The University of Tennessee entitled "Some Observations on the Study of Tennessee Speech." In that paper I suggested the need for continuing the study of the spoken language of native Tennesseans, summarized briefly the state of dialect studies in Tennessee, and outlined a proposal for a state-wide sociolinguistic survey of Tennessee speech. At that time, I also reviewed some of the many reasons for continuing the study of Tennessee speech. The speech of native Tennesseans is obviously of intrinsic interest to all who live within the state. Additional reasons for studying Tennessee speech have been given by dialectologists as well as people in other disciplines. Raven I. McDavid, Jr. articulated the rationale for the first detailed survey, the Linguistic Atlas of the Gulf States (LAGS), when he suggested, in a paper entitled "What Happens in Tennessee?", that a detailed survey would be necessary to discover what happens to the patterns of distribution of linguistic features that have already been regionally identified along the Atlantic Seaboard, what the folk vocabulary of Tennessee is like, to what extent collapsing of historical phonemic differences has taken place, and what the grammatical situation is (1970: 119,127-128). More generally, J. Kenneth Moreland, a cultural anthropologist with a deep interest in the South, has suggested that time is crucial for the study of dialects in the South. Several years ago he urged that needed research be started quickly:

> The South might be characterized as a formerly distinctive region that is fast losing its distinctiveness. It has been different from other American regions in its caste-like system of race relations, its agriculturally-based economy and its relatively slow industrialization, its fundamentalist religion, and its feeling of separateness from the rest of the nation. All of these characteristics are probably being altered as cultural traits and patterns throughout America become similar. (1967: 140)

Since that time, I have learned that collecting in Tennessee for the LAGS project is virtually complete. (For a detailed description of the project, see Pedersen 1971 and 1973, and Pedersen et al 1972.) This is important for other studies, because it means that traditional Atlas data has now been gathered for the study of the speech patterns of adult natives of Tennessee. What is needed now is the gathering of sociolinguistic data which will yield sound and relevant pedagogical information. This can best be done by including in a survey an examination of the language of children, partly for immediate pedagogical usefulness, partly so that researchers can gain insight into the processes of obsolescence and replacement in the syntactic, phonological, and possibly also lexical systems of three or four generations of native speakers of Tennessee English. Such an investigation must be based upon a careful examination of existing data and should take into account the expectation that all records for the LAGS project will be ready for editing by July 1, 1977 (Pedersen 1974).

Additionally, such a survey ought to result in the collection of the kind of data which will enable us to study the relationship between speech

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and writing in the dialects of native Tennesseans. We know--and those of us who teach freshman English anywhere are usually reminded of the fact daily--that written skills in English are not dependent on oral ones. In terms of contemporary grammatical theory, that is, orthographic rules do not apply to the output of phonological rules. No matter how we understand the semantic or conceptual structures underlying language, we know that transformational rules are applied to them to rearrange, delete, or add constituents and to supply various non-lexical morphemes. Then the lexicon provides morphemes with true lexical meaning. The resulting syntactic surface structure contains in linear format all the morphemes of a sentence and specifies their relationship to each other. Such grammatical morphemes as PAST, PERFECT, PRESENT, PLURAL, etc., do not have phonological representations when they are generated by transformational rules. The rules for replacing abstract formatives such as PLURAL with a specified phonological shape vary among English dialects. It is crucial that both phonological rules and orthographic rules operate on the same syntactic surface structures to map underlying phonological representations into pronunciation and spelled forms. Orthographic rules do not operate on the output of the phonological rules. (For a more detailed examination of these phenomena and their relevance for English teachers, see Underwood 1974.) For these reasons I propose to collect samples of written English from at least some of the informants interviewed. This is why I now find it appropriate to speak of Tennessee English or Tennessee language, rather than Tennessee speech.

The first stage of the investigation is bibliographical. This stage of the investigation has begun, for students enrolled in a linguistics course at The University of Tennessee this quarter are participating in a group

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project in which they are compiling a bibliography of works about Tennessee English. Beginning with James B. McMillan's indispensable Annotated Bibliography of Southern American English, these students are surveying the literature about Tennessee dialects. One of the students, Jonathan Lighter, is contributing to the project a list of all the works in his slang collection which concern Tennessee language use. (Lighter is working on a dictionary of American slang; a sample of his work will be published in a forthcoming issue of American Speech.) As the bibliographical stage of the investigation continues, researchers will prepare careful and accurate annotations of all existing works.

There are two large collections of data which will also be useful in planning the survey, that of the LAGS project, of course, directed by Lee Pedersen of Emory University, and that of the Dictionary of American Regional English (DARE), directed by Frederic G. Cassidy of the University of Wisconsin at Madison. Records from both these projects should certainly be examined in the planning stages of the projected survey. As a matter of fact, Professor Cassidy has already provided a list of the communities where DARE questionnaires were answered, and he has agreed to provide copies of the tapes that were collected for the project. Additionally, there are available the published results of the postal survey of the Interior South, undertaken by Gordon R. Wood of Southern Illinois University. Finally, there are the records collected by Harold Orton and his students when he was at The University of Tennessee. All these must be considered for immediate and long-range usefulness.

Once the basic bibliography is compiled and other materials have been examined, work can begin on the construction and testing of a questionnaire.

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Since all records have been collected in Tennessee for the LAGS project, it will not be necessary to collect those items which have been target items in the Linguistic Atlas projects. Instead, it will be possible to concentrate on phonological, orthographic, and syntactic systems of informants. It will probably not be productive to collect vocabulary items at this point--though of course it will not be desirable to ignore the possibility of collecting specialized lexical information that is not elicited by the LAGS questionnaire.

At this time I think that the best way to achieve the desired ends of this projected study is to make use of research methods similar to those developed for the Arkansas Language Survey (ALS), begun by Gary N. Underwood at the University of Arkansas in Fayetteville in 1970. My work as Associate Director and Principal Investigator of the ALS, together with my earlier work in Newton County, Arkansas--where I used a questionnaire based in part on the Atlas questionnaire, in part on the DARE questionnaire, and in part on questionnaires developed by researchers studying urban dialects (in particular, the questionnaires used by William Labov in New York City and Roger Shuy et al in Detroit)--enables me, I feel, to make reasonable projections about the usefulness of its research design in Tennessee.

For brevity's sake, I shall forego describing the research methods of the ALS in detail. Briefly, the Survey involves the use of modified random sampling techniques in systematically selected counties. In each county, twelve persons are interviewed, three each from four different family groups. The questionnaire is model-oriented, rather than item-oriented, and it is designed to enable the interviewer to record informants' speech in a wide range of styles. (For detailed information about the research methods

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and field procedures, see Dumas 1973 and Underwood 1972, 1973a, 1973b, and 1974.)

One innovation will be the collecting of samples of written English. Here I will follow the precedent set by Jacob Ornstein and Z. Anthony Kruszewski of the Cross-Cultural Southwest Ethnic Study Center at the University of Texas at El Paso. For the Sociolinguistic Studies on Southwest Bilingualism project, their researchers there took a stratified random sample of the full-time, unmarried, undergraduate population. Additionally, a ten percent sub-sample was taken of the larger sample, limited to bilingual Chicanos, whose speech and written language (in both English and Spanish in both cases) are being studied extensively. (For a detailed description of the sampling procedure, see Brooks, Brooks, Goodman, and Ornstein 1972; Murray 1972; Ornstein 1973a, 1973b, 1974a, and 1974b; and Ornstein and Dumas 1974.) In doing this, I shall be working in accord with the principle articulated in the closing paragraphs of Hans Kurath's recent overview, Studies in Area Linguistics:

> Many of the problems with which research in social dialectology is found are also encountered by the student of bilingual communities, such as the correlation between the several languages with social groups, the conditions that prompt the choice of the medium of communication on the part of bilingual speakers, and differences from one medium to the other.
>
> Since the lines are more sharply drawn between languages than between dialects, the student of bilingual areas has certain advantages in dealing with such problems. For this reason it seems highly probable that the social dialectologist can improve his

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techniques and interpretations by keeping in touch with research now underway in the field of bilingualism. (1972: 184)

In view of the work that remains to be done before a questionnaire can be constructed and tested, and before communities for interviewing can be decided on, it is obviously impossible to make detailed projections about when and exactly how the aims of the survey I have described will be carried out. I would, however, like to conclude by suggesting that the general aims of the survey will be these:

1. The continued gathering of linguistic data useful for identifying geographic boundaries in the state.
2. The gaining of insight into the processes of obsolescence and replacement in the syntactic, phonological, and possibly also lexical systems of native Tennesseans.
3. The identification of the linguistic correlates of social stratification of Tennessee English in both its spoken and written forms.
4. The determination of the extent to which style shifting is important as an explanation of linguistic variation in Tennessee.
5. The testing of the hypothesis that Americans generally have a negative attitude toward their own use of language.
6. The gathering of sound and relevant pedagogical information.
7. The gathering of data which will yield information about the relationship between speech and writing.

I solicit your comments and your cooperation.

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